

Kurt Lewin's model of change revisited in a Brazilian Higher Education context

M Botelho, R Kowalski & S Bartlett

Corresponding author: R Kowalski

Universidade Federal Rural da Amazônia, Instituto Socioambiental e dos Recursos Hídricos, Avenida Perimetral, 2501, Caixa Postal - 917
Bairro: Terra Firme, CEP: 66.077-830, Belém-Pará-Brasil

Email bandb.kowalski@btopenworld.com

Tel: 07814401529

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Abstract

The initiative we report here came out of a belief that the university needed to become a learning organization through the development of its professionals and the formation of a community of practice. Consequently we took Lewin's Normative-Re-educative approach. It was our view that only the introduction of Action Research as a professional practice by the staff of the institution through a 'T'-group approach, epitomizing Lewin's beliefs, held the potential to deliver the participation, empowerment, and democratic process that could bring about the revitalization of the institution.

The success of this project was rooted in four key principles: neutrality, voluntary participation, time flexibility, and sensibility of motivation. Our initial understanding that the process of change would go through three linear and discreet phases was replaced by the recognition that these are not distinguishable, sequential phases in time but occur simultaneously and overlap. The interweaving of objectives through time may be represented through the

visual metaphor of a rhizome or stele. It must also include an appreciation that actions have the potential to work against some objectives whilst simultaneously for others. It is the congruent adherence to a set of core principles within a flexible framework of action that permits us to achieve our objectives.

Key Words: action research, Brazil, Higher Education, Lewin, organisational change.

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s in Brazil a debate has been taking place over what Cristovão Buarque, the former Minister of Education, once called “*the crisis of the university*” (Buarque, 2003). Gonçalves, *et al* (2003) have suggested that universities in Brazil, like universities in many parts of the world, have been accused of being isolated and ‘ivory towers’ separated from society through their lack of involvement with their surrounding communities (Levin & Greenwood, 2001) and are perceived just as monasteries once used to be. Whilst many first world universities have actively shed such an image (Doring, 2002), in Brazil this has not thus far happened.

In the case of Brazil, there have been various attempts to explain this ‘crisis’. For instance, Trigueiro (1999) argued that lecturers have a high degree of individual autonomy which leads them to resist any external interference that is seen as a threat. Thus as Mendes (1997) pointed out, whenever an attempt to change the university system is proposed by the government lecturers take a strong, united line against it in a process of self-defence that he termed ‘university corporatism’. This uniting of conservative forces helps maintain the old patterns of behaviour, attitudes and privileges that have served to increasingly separate life in the universities from the wider society in which they exist.

In addition, every four years the academic bodies elect the senior management. Whilst this appears to be an inherently democratic process by which a community governs itself, it nevertheless creates political factions that engage in a struggle for power. The scenario is one of feudal conflict (Trigueiro, 1999), where the different groups are in constant dispute, generating a lack of internal communication and creating a climate of mistrust as these factions move further from one another with the approach of each successive election. The benefits of being on the ‘winning side’ and the drawbacks of being identified with the losing group can be very serious for the careers of all individual lecturers in the institution. Thus allegiance becomes an important matter and, equally significant, not alienating those who may one day assume power. This means that lecturers are less likely to take an active part in debates concerning the future of the university and become increasingly isolated and introspective individuals.

The Case in Point

The study university was originally established in 1951 as an Agronomy Technical School for its region and then in 1972 was elevated to the status of a Faculdade, before receiving the charter of a University in 2002. Thus, although new as a university as an educational institution it has a history stretching back more than 50 years.

At present it has the most highly qualified teaching staff of any equivalent institution in Northern Brazil. At the time of this study UFRA had 93 academics in total of which 33 had PhDs and 48 Masters degrees. It contributes to the region's rural development by training professionals in natural resources sciences such as agronomy, forestry, veterinarian medicine, and more recently, in aquaculture & fisheries and animal production.

During the quadrennial elections of the senior managers the institutional tension is substantial and the consequences far reaching. For instance, it hinders truly democratic discussions amongst academic staff, so that the autonomy referred to previously has become disengagement. Lecturers have been deterred from speaking openly about issues that involved anything more than their research or teaching subjects. In addition, managerial duties are consistently given to a small group of academic staff involved directly in the political struggles whereas most others have been excluded. In the end the vast majority of the academic community have been largely removed from the decision-making process and have suffered an accompanying decline in self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

One of the few times that we have observed the whole academic community coming together is during strikes. In general, these appear to be motivated by dissatisfaction with remuneration or with the attempts by the Ministry of Education (MEC) to implement reform. In general, a strike occurs in April just before the government announces the new salary award or during the second semester when the national budget is presented. More than that, these strikes represent a serious barrier to the continuity of any systemic process of change being carried out within the university.

The situation discussed above called for some form of discontinuous or episodic change intended to address the divergence resulting from what Weick and Quinn (1999, p.365) have described as the: "*growing misalignment between an inertial deep structure and perceived environmental demands*". According to Ford and Ford (1995, p.543) such "*Intentional change occurs when a change agent deliberately and consciously sets out to establish conditions and circumstances that are different from what they are now and then accomplishes that through some set or series of actions and interventions either singularly or in*

collaboration with other people.” As a small team comprising a single member of the University staff and two external supporters we had the temerity to initiate such an episodic change.

From our perspective, the initiative we report here needed to take a Normative-Re-educative approach, where *“changes in normative orientation involve changes in attitudes, values, skills and significant relationships.”* (Chin & Bennis, 1976, p.32) but which also took into account the continuous nature of change or as Tsoukas and Chia (2002, p.569) expressed it: *“to treat change not as an epiphenomenon, as a mere curiosity or exception, but to acknowledge its centrality in the constitution of socio-economic life.”* by encouraging lecturers to seek their own solutions to each situation and to reflect upon them. We believed that the university needed to become a learning organization through the development of its professionals and the formation of a community of practice (Altrichter, 2005); initially amongst a small group of academic staff but incrementally widening to draw in more and more.

Approach

Following the 100th anniversary of Kurt Lewin’s birth (Bargal, Gold & Lewin, 1992) there has been a renewal of interest in many of his ideas associated with interventions for change (for example: Ford & Ford, 1995; Styhre, 2002; and Burnes, 2004). Although Gill and Johnson (2003, p.75) suggested that Lewin’s: *“greatest contribution was probably the idea of studying things through changing them and then seeing the effects of those changes.”* his overall contributions to the theory and practice of change have been generally categorized into three broad fields (Lewin 1951) as firstly Group Dynamics, as Benne (1976, p.325) described it: *“the indispensability of groups as media for effective re-education”*; secondly as the paradigm known as Action Research (Bargal, Gold & Lewin 1992) which Benne (1976, p.316) described as: *“a morality of focusing the cooperative human intelligences of those within those situations upon inventing ways of managing and improving them.”* and *“a format for integrating personal re-education and social change into the same process.”* (p.321); and thirdly as Field Theory (Burnes 2004) linked to a model of change: *“conceptualized as progressing through successive phases called unfreezing, moving, and [re-]freezing.”* (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p.301).

Indeed such has been the reference to models of staged, stepwise change over the years that, as Hendry (1996, p.624) put it: *“Scratch any account of creating and managing change and the idea of change as a three-stage process which necessarily begins with a process of unfreezing will not be far below the surface. Indeed it has been said that the whole theory of change is reducible to this one idea of Kurt Lewin’s”.*

Nevertheless, Lewin's total approach was quintessentially normative-re-educative and, confronted with the circumstances prevailing at the study university, chimed absolutely with our feelings for how best to proceed. So, we determined to introduce Action Research at the level of professional practice to a manageably small group of staff, as a vehicle to foster changes in individual behaviour, group cohesion and a wider emancipatory engagement in the future of the institution.

In this situation, as a combination of an internal agent of change supported by external advisers, and following the analysis made by Levin and Greenwood (2001, p. 103) that:

“Universities, as institutions charged with the generation and transmission of knowledge, have created a variety of conditions inimical to the practice of action research and thus to competent knowledge generation, thereby producing poor quality of knowledge and isolating themselves unproductively from the societies they claim to serve.”

It was our view that only the introduction of Action Research as a professional practice by the staff of the institution through a 'T'-group approach to the establishment of a community of practice, epitomizing Lewin's approach, held the potential to deliver the participation, empowerment, and democratic process that could bring about the revitalization of the institution.

As Burnes (2004, p.984) emphasised: *“Lewin's view was very much that the understanding and learning which this process [of Action Research] produces for the individuals and groups concerned, which then feeds into changed behaviour, is more important than any change as such.”* However, we sought to give ourselves distance by eschewing any part in determining where the lens of the participants' Action Research projects would be directed.

In addition, in keeping with the overall philosophy of our approach, we also committed ourselves to research our own practice of initiating change in this situation in order to reveal fresh experiences and insights, for as Kahn (1974, p. 487) recognised, we are all in danger that: *“A few theoretical propositions are repeated without additional data or development; a few bits of homey advice are reiterated without proof or disproof; and a few sturdy empirical observations are quoted with reverence but without refinement or explication.”* So to ward off such possibilities the facilitation was undertaken as a piece of Action Research in its own right.

Methodology

Despite being formulated over fifty years ago Lewin's model of change management retains its' utility and currency as a reference point in debating organizational development (Styhre, 2002). As Kirkbridge (1993, p.33) acknowledged: *"The voluminous literature on change contains a plethora of different models of change, most of which are simply variations on a basic theme and amplifications of the seminal Lewinian model."* Indeed, as Styhre (2002, p. 348) declared: *"In many cases, organization change literature offers linear models of change wherein one step of activities is succeeded by another into a series of changes (i.e. the "n-step model")"*.

Importantly, Fullan (2001, p. 50) summarized the literature on models of change thus: *"Most researchers now see three broad phases to the change process. Phase I-variously labelled initiation, mobilization, or adoption... Phase II-implementation or initial use... Phase III-called continuation, incorporation, routinization, or institutionalization"*, which has had the effect of softening the earlier Lewinian concepts, particularly keeping the final phase more fluid than in the original, and we took this form of the model as the basis for both acting in and analysing this study.

Because we had limited ability to facilitate change, and because we expected to go round the major Action Research cycle at least twice, we envisaged that the process from the outset would unfold as presented in Figure 1. Each intended phase is plotted against a time-line defined in terms of the years and months over the length of our project.

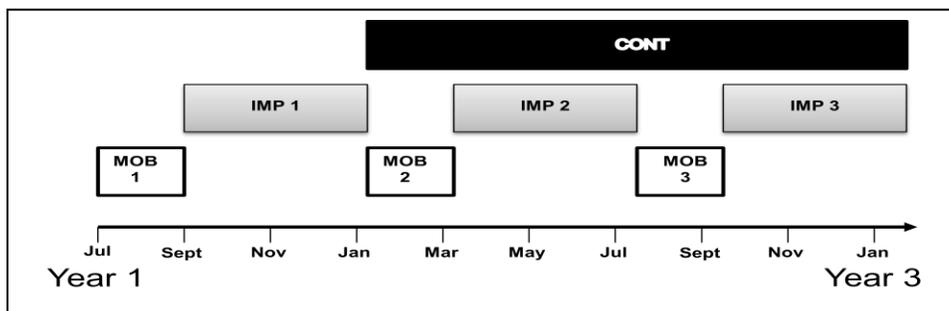


Figure 1: Time line of the actions of facilitation as they were originally envisaged.

We anticipated that mobilization would include seeking permissions, informing the whole staff, recruiting participants and training them in action research. During implementation, whilst the participants selected and formulated their own projects, the facilitator would establish regular Action Research Group meetings (ARG) and hold individual counselling sessions. Continuation would be supported by getting the participants to evangelize action research through

institutional seminars, widening the scope of their projects and recruiting new cohorts of participants into the ARG.

However, several factors delayed the first mobilization and implementation. Also adjustments had to be made to the methodology as it unfolded, so that in the end the facilitation comprised two, instead of three, implementation phases and mobilizations 1, 2 and 3 were adjusted in duration as well as in timing. The whole process followed the time line as presented in Figure 2.

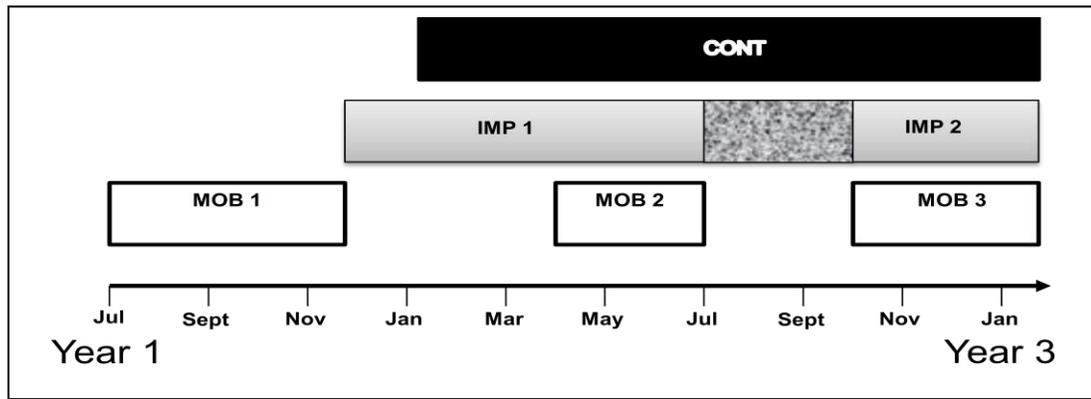


Figure 2: Time line of the actions of facilitation as they actually transpired.

We must emphasize that the final degree of overlap between the different phases which we had originally intended to occur only in the continuation phase (Fig. 1) happened not just between implementation 1 and 2, but also between all three phases from April to June Yr2 and from October to January Yr3 when mobilizations 2 and 3 took place. In addition, as the participants became more autonomous in the management of the ARG, and in response to their expressed needs, separate small AR groups were established to focus upon thematic groupings of participants' projects.

Findings

Undoubtedly the overall process of this project departed from the linear pattern of the model proposed by Lewin. The change process is better described as disruptive, discontinuous, fluid and fluxing (Styhre, 2002), which enabled us to see the project as an interaction of complex, integrated and socially dependent processes that were affected by a range of causes (strike, class, professional background, election) and concerns (salary, agenda, methodology, political connection). So finally, we blended these ideas with a cyclical process based on the AR methodology and postulate a new framework shown in Figure 3 below.

This is in effect a cross-sectional view of the time line presented in Figure 2. The zones labelled MOB, IMP and CON encompass those activities and interactions that took place associated with the step-wise phases of our plan of work, as the orthodox model suggests. However, within this framework there are three levels of facilitative action spanning the three phases of the process; a first level characterized by actions that occurred within, and exclusively affecting, one phase of the process, which is exemplified by the individual contact between the teacher and the facilitator.

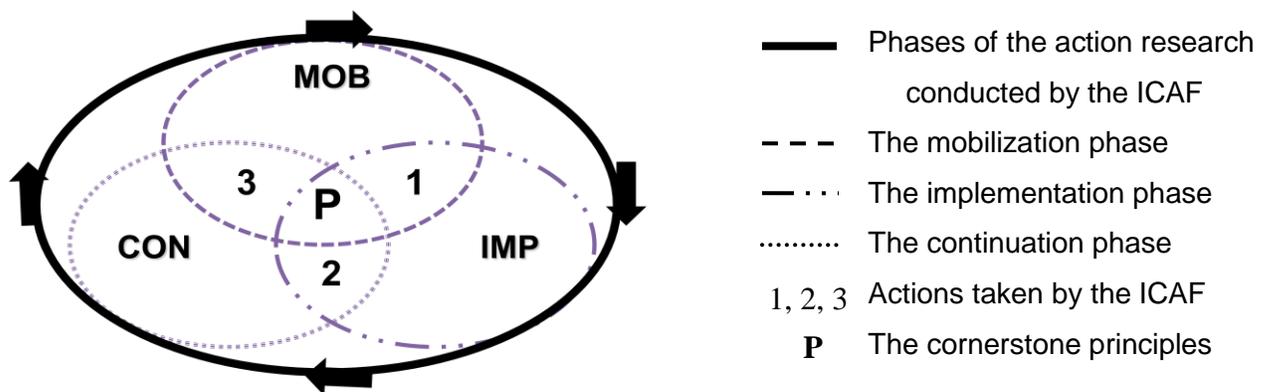


Figure 3: The graphic description of the approach used to introduce and to use AR as a vehicle for professional development and institutional change.

The second level, represented by the three zones labelled 1, 2 and 3 are actions that were conceived and undertaken within one phase but whose impacts were also important for another phase, such as: presentations to the rector and his rival (1), the formation of sub-groups (2) and the ARG meetings and open seminars (3).

However, the third level, the zone labelled P, are those actions and most importantly those ways of acting that occurred almost continuously throughout the intervention and that impacted upon the unfolding of all three phases of the project. That is, in order to be less vulnerable to the external pressures and to be sustainable this project had to be conducted based upon principles that would be above the simplistic assumption that: "*in organization change the first stage of the process is succeed by another, and so forth.*" (Styhre, 2002, p.345). We came to refer to them as the core principles that must sustain the whole conduct of the process of introduction and adoption of AR within a Rural University in Brazil.

It became clear that it is essential to have congruence amongst the different phases and actions throughout the overall process in order not to self-sabotage (Kowalski, 2004). Importantly those core principles were not available to us at the outset, even if we could have imagined from other narratives (e.g. Ford, 2008) that they might be important. Thus the success of this project in its context was rooted in four key principles developed and fostered by the insider change agent and that, emerging from the research process, became identified as:

- Neutrality
- Voluntary participation
- Time flexibility
- Sensibility of Motivation

Neutrality

This principle was probably the most difficult to be maintained in the entire process. In the light of what is set out above we present the concept of neutrality for this project as:

- **The change agent must not be associated with any political group.**

Neutrality enabled the change agent to be perceived as just a fellow lecturer, instead of as attached to one or other political group within the institution. This neutrality was responsible for the engagement of lecturers from all political groups involved in the forthcoming election. Thus, the AR project was neither seen as a political nor as a personal project but rather as an institutional initiative.

AR is a process that seeks to empower participants, thus as each participant determined their own study agenda this provided neutrality to our participation as well as to the involvement of the other participants. Gradually a locus for discourse was created that extended beyond the boundaries of the individual projects and encouraged discussion as a community of practice that questioned itself about what aspects of the institution needed changing.

Inside the ARG the main action guaranteeing neutrality was the establishment during the first meeting of an agreement not to discuss internal political issues. This paid dividends as the participants increasingly focussed upon their AR projects and to discuss more openly their fears, problems, ideas and plans during the meetings.

- **Each participant should demonstrate neutrality inside their institutional microcosms.**

From the outset of the first phase of implementation all participants had their neutrality tested as they began to interact with lecturers at large through the e-journal of the British Education Studies Association

individual AR projects. As had happened to the facilitator, their involvement with other lecturers put them in the spotlight.

As participants were challenged to maintain neutrality some started to lose confidence as they were not able to recognise what was missing in their AR approach. In other cases lecturers were not able to establish neutrality even when they had recognised the need for it. During the following stages of the project these lecturers struggled to develop their projects or in some cases decided to abandon their projects altogether.

In contrast to the first cycle, the second cycle of mobilization did not have the initial presentations to the staff. In fact, it was characterised by a small number of lecturers spontaneously asking to integrate into the group and who were nominated by participants of the first cohort. By asking for nominations the participants were subject to the temptation of choosing lecturers based on their relationships, or to avoid those considered as rivals within the political context. However, what was observed showed that the participants were not only trying to be neutral but also practicing neutrality, for they nominated lecturers that were related through their professional activities irrespective of whether they were from the same political group or not. This second group of participants turned out to be as representative of the staff population as the first had been in relation to their political and hierarchical positions, gender, experience and qualification.

Furthermore, this group faced far fewer problems regarding neutrality. Two major factors were clearly responsible for this. Firstly, they were drawn into an environment where the existing participants already presented neutrality as a common approach. Secondly, the election process was over, which considerably reduced the level of tension within the overall institution.

As described previously, conflicts regarding neutrality, although minimised, continued in a latent form, which could be even worse. Thus the change agent had to recognise this and tackle it by bringing those situations where these problems were common to the attention of participants at ARG meetings and individual tutorials and discuss them openly. Having learned how to ensure neutrality, or at least having recognised its importance within their projects, first cohort participants played an important role in giving support to subsequent participants and keeping the focus of meetings on the AR purpose.

Thus, instead of avoiding delicate issues as with the first group, this time these issues were used to anticipate and reduce those problems that had been faced by the first participants. Brokering this participant to participant contact enabled them to learn based on their experience, otherwise this knowledge would have been only a vicarious opinion borrowed from the change agent.

- **Neutrality has to become an open issue so that its significance will be discovered rather than taught.**

As the project reached the stage with open seminars, the participants began to discuss their findings with other lecturers outside the ARG (continuation phase), and the level of neutrality achieved paid dividends as none of their researches were challenged either at a personal or a political level. Most importantly, they were all requested to support course coordinators and to discuss the rolling out of AR within the University context. Indeed, all participants concluding their seminars at the end of the first cycle of AR reported that they had been sought out by colleagues to discuss more deeply their findings and to explain how they could work with AR. Thus increasing numbers of lecturers became more aware of their *raison d'être* as lecturers and in a rational and purposive way they then became willing to fulfil those responsibilities through the adoption of Action Research.

Voluntary Participation

The general perception of public university lecturers, as described by Trigueiro (1999), and Venceslau and Brunetti (2003), was that they are professionals that are primarily motivated by salary (money); secondly, that they need rules, structure, hierarchies and strong controls to keep working; and thirdly, that they prefer to be directed rather than to think for themselves. Nonetheless, it is our experience at this University that it is easier to find lecturers that are (a) generally interested in their work and want to do a good job; (b) are motivated by a desire to learn and achieved their own potential; (c) want responsibility; and (d) avoid imposed controls over them.

- **Using volunteers avoids initial resistance to the project and brings those who are self-directed learners into the process.**

The restriction to prohibit senior managers from being involved as volunteers was responsible for minimising the problem of 'affiliation with political interests', thereby enabling the group to start and keep the process outside the management's direct guidance. The use of volunteers and the freedom for them to select their research focus is an alternative that seeks a decentralized social learning process (Ellerman, 2002). The complex and highly structured hierarchy is set aside and as a result encourages a process of horizontal learning.

- **The involvement of managers as volunteers should be avoided.**

Associated with the concept of neutrality, working with volunteers proved capable of establishing a 'Professional Community of Practice' (Altrichter, 2005) where all participants systematically asked questions, made suggestions, improved their cognitive skill and fundamentally, discussed their findings, doubts, fears and

ideas openly (Ford 2008). During the first cycle of mobilization this professional community of practice was gradually formed as the sense of neutrality was recognised and accepted by all participants. The self-organization of small AR Groups was essential in this regard.

- **The involvement of new participants must spread the impact of their actions, not cause disturbance to group cohesion.**

As the first cycle of implementation began the group of participants adopted a position of peripheral observers towards each other, as they were not confident enough about the methodology to act as critical friends. At this moment, the individual tutorials were important in building up confidence as the time allowed for assimilation during the training stage of mobilization had clearly been insufficient.

Nevertheless, as soon as participants started to improve their theoretical knowledge, their confidence grew and the formal ARG meetings became places for professional learning. From this moment the group cohesion increased dramatically as they became connected firstly by what they were discovering and sharing in terms of teaching methodology, the role that a lecturer has to play and the rules that affect their daily activities and secondly by how they began to relate to each other through the group identity produced within this community of practice (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Furthermore, the change agent had to take account of the fact that the volunteers were not homogeneous, good or bad, would develop their structural hierarchy, have their personal interests and, above all, they were not working exclusively for the project, to cope with unfolding challenges.

Despite such challenges throughout the whole process, the ARG kept its cohesion which could best be exemplified from the open seminars delivered by some participants. After these seminars some academics from the wider population who did not agree with the results, methodology or even the conclusions presented, expressed their disagreement by trying to diminish the value of the research as well as the competence of the researchers. These attitudes were vigorously challenged by other members of the ARG who had fortuitously heard these comments. The arguments used by these 'guardians' were made in relation to the value of the work and what they had learned through it. These attitudes showed that all participants were sharing the same vision of the process.

Through voluntary participation it was possible to have a group that could be representative of the entire University. Furthermore, each one became responsible for a small initiative that ultimately would affect a complex and highly unstable context. Therefore, it became possible to achieve a collective evaluation and reflection about what worked and what didn't in these different contexts.

Thus, the higher, institutional level validation of the change process was observed.

Time flexibility

The principle of Time flexibility needs to be captured as two different and complementary vectors, namely, 'pace' and 'scheduling'. Both are related to the rhythm of the process of change so that all actions developed by the change agent and the participants led to a collective learning process that was gradual and did not represent a violent rupture with 'established tradition' (Barbier, 1985).

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The change agent must provide equitable time opportunities at all costs even to their own time.

The pressure for results and the desire to get on with the process may be disorienting for the change agent. At the beginning a slow start had to be expected. Also the change agent had to be prepared to make adjustments from the very outset of the project otherwise the next steps could have been dramatically compromised. Time spent in the early stages paid dividends as the process developed. One of these dividends could be noted in that almost 75% of the first cohort participants came from the presentation made during the lecturers' union assembly and those individual presentations which had been organized later (Botelho, Kowalski & Bartlett, 2006).

In the implementation phase, 'time' took on two different qualities. Firstly, there was the dilemma of exerting pressure to produce stimulation versus producing inhibition (Messner & Rauch, 1995). In particular the line between helpful assistance and inhibiting pressure could become blurred as some participants were motivated by the disciplining presence of the change agent whereas others were inhibited by it.

Secondly, each lecturer had their own time scale. Ensuring that participants would progress differently, at their own pace, so that their progress would become increasingly 'spread out'. Consequently, the change agent had to treat them individually. Again, the individual tutorials were important to build confidence and to construct a full understanding about Action Research. Thus, gradually, all participants moved from the position of peripheral observer to the pro-active position of critical friend.

▪ **Time has to be used judiciously to build up confidence through the right level of pressure.**

Even for the most dedicated participant it was difficult to set time aside for a commitment into which they had entered voluntarily, and the demands of which

they were likely to have underestimated. At this moment the change agent had to provide time for reflection and also for learning to reflect (Moon, 2002). This time for reflection represents the moment of self-doubt where participants became aware of their reality, which inevitably led them to a moment of low self-esteem. Thus, the change agent had to accept the new situation, reinforce the motives that had led the participants to volunteer in the first place, revisit the results achieved so far and thereby reduce the risk of more withdrawals, which could have taken numbers below those sufficient to initiate the wider process of institutional change. However, all of this must not negate the principle of voluntary participation and the risk of creating dependency or resistance amongst the participants. This was indubitably the most critical moment of the entire project. Once a working appreciation was found by some participants it was time to use the elevated level of confidence to spread the impact of AR, without causing disturbance to group cohesion. So that was the moment to begin the second cycle of mobilization.

Sensibility of Motivation

Knowledge and understanding of what motivates people in a particular situation is critical to the success of the work of a change agent. When we were planning how to present the AR project to the academic staff two major considerations drove our thinking: (a) how to present the goals of the project and (b) how to present the process through which these goals should be achieved. In other words, how to influence some staff to adopt and to use AR in their daily activities?

- **The change agent must answer obliquely the underlying participant question: Why is this worthwhile for me?**

To work through the goals that each volunteer had and the extent to which they put value on them, seemed to be inappropriate due to the great diversity and the impossibility of correctly addressing each one. Thus it was never intended to offer direct answers to such questions. The lessons from the field of development (Ellerman, 2005) have demonstrated that when a change agent provides the answers that are sought they will, thereby, generate extrinsic motivators which, although they will give impulsion to the process, will not bring authentic change because the source of the motivation is external and extrinsic and thus the effort is not owned by the participants.

Different participants reacted in different ways, depending on past successes and failures. Thus, for different reasons each participant experienced a drop in their self-esteem which, when it was manifested as more withdrawals, became a threat to the project. At this crucial moment two major temptations appeared: (a) to involve the senior managers and; (b) to force the process. However, both

would have led the process towards the familiar path of a traditional top-down programme of change. In other words, the change agent would have reverted to an expert who could drive the process without the proper commitment of the participants. This was the first key point for the sustainability of the process of change through the use of AR.

- **The change agent should act as an external motivator who nevertheless fosters intrinsic motivation.**

Even though an insider, the facilitator was viewed at first as an external motivator and for that reason our influence at this stage on no account could be through extrinsic motivators. In fact, the way that we approached the academic staff was by trying to stress the intrinsic drives that each one was able to use to respond to the question about why participation could be worthwhile. In the end, 'curiosity' was not sufficient in itself to sustain engagement in the project. On the other hand, at all costs we avoided encouraging the use of affection or relationship as a driver. The possibility to develop professionally, which we expressed as individual and institutional rewards, was the valid driver that ultimately separated those who just enjoyed the idea from those who were really willing to engage.

The main action of the change agent was not to expurgate extrinsic incentives in favour of intrinsic motivators but to keep the extrinsic incentives in the motivational background so that they would never drive the process. This scenario was constructed when the change agent reminded participants of some initial small success, challenged ideas and, most importantly, established open communication within the group for mutual support. The latter was the most difficult action as the main characteristic of academics within this university was their individualistic behaviour.

The use of Action Research as a methodology for institutional strengthening was necessarily founded on individual achievement, and therefore rather difficult to assess. Thus, instead of trying to measure the level of success that each participant was achieving the change agent had to provide the opportunity (time) to enable all to achieve what they needed. In simple words, that was the moment when the group began to split into subgroups. This action certainly enabled the change agent to avoid the temptation of over-driving the process; thereby avoiding any prospect of dependency. At the same time, it permitted the identification of those participants who had a tendency to act opportunistically and thus the change agent could cope with those structural problems mentioned earlier under the voluntary participation principle.

Now, the second mobilization cycle was crucial for the process and was conducted in relation to two major concerns: (a) commitment and (b) enlargement. Thus, when each participant was asked to nominate one or more possible volunteers they had the opportunity to start to play the role of facilitator

in their own right. As a result group cohesion was indeed strengthened and the first, wider institutional impacts could be detected when the AR projects started to be noticed and discussed by lecturers outside of the ARG.

Secondly, some other lecturers started to apply similar practices in relation to their own daily activities without applying the AR principles. That is, even without provoking structural changes the AR group had started to encourage other lecturers to try new approaches, which would thereby be integrated into institutional procedures.

▪ **The control of the process must be owned by all participants**

From the outset we stressed that each participant would have freedom to enter as well as exit at anytime; that it would be an opportunity for professional improvement; that it would be based on free speech and honesty; that it would be an opportunity to explore and experiment with new ideas and concepts; and that the research focus would be freely chosen by them. Furthermore, the fact that the second group of participants was formed from nominations by existing participants emphasised the sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the process.

As each participant became more pro-active in determining the actions of the group they began to assume more and more the role of facilitator and not simply a supporter. These actions are critical to avoid dependency as well as the 'Moral Hazard' (Buchanan, 1977). In other words, what participants gain in responsibility is fundamental to maintain the motives for doing AR instead of just waiting for a solution developed by others.

Participants being in charge of the process emphasised the sense of commitment so that they start to adopt the same role as the change agent/facilitator due to their role as external motivators for the later participants. This represented the moment when a shift in the course of their actions occurred. Some of the initial participants moved from the status of just being intrinsically motivated to the status where they were also extrinsically motivated, that is, they started to seek for institutional meaning to their AR projects. This shift represented the consolidation of the continuation phase of the project.

Interpretation

For the purposes of this study the interpretation of this change management processes is best captured by the indirect approach. Hart (1941, p.X) gave it emphasis thus: "*This idea of the indirect approach is closely related to all problems of the influence of mind upon mind – the most influential factor in human history*" and Ellerman (2005) provides extensive arguments to show that

only indirect approaches are capable of bringing about changes at the level of attitude.

Thus, our initial understanding that the process of change would go through three linear and discreet phases, namely: a) mobilization; b) implementation; and c) continuation, has been replaced by the recognition that these are not at all distinguishable sequential phases in time but rather characterize the pursuit of three sets of objectives underpinning the different intentions of the change agent. These three intentions are to garner and maintain motivation for the process, to bring about actions that lead to change in practices, and to ensure that these changes will be sustainable. Importantly, as Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990, p. 161) recognised: *“The sequence of steps is important because activities appropriate at one time are often counterproductive if started too early. Timing is everything in the management of change.”* which involves: *“one [moving] from thinking in terms of a spatial metaphor, as one does when one thinks that individuals interact to produce a system outside them at a higher level, to a temporal process way of thinking, where the temporal processes are those of human relating.”* (Stacey & Griffin 2005, p.3).

Such interweaving of objectives through time may be represented through the visual metaphor of a rhizome or stele (Fig.4), exemplified by Chia’s comment that: *“the rhizome connects any point to any other in an essentially heterogeneous collective assemblage of occurrences”* (Chia, 1999, p.222).

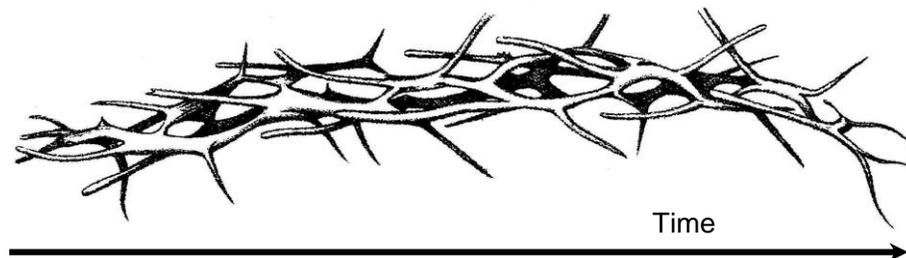


Fig. 4 The interweaving of actions to achieve specific objectives can be envisaged as a meristematic stele (after Rostowzew, 1891) with a cross section approximating to Figure 3

Thus each phase, previously conceived in a linear approach, must now be translated into an appreciation of the various objectives of the change agent that pertained to that phase, impacted upon by each action, so that the response provoked by a specific action can provide support or be used as a resource for other objectives placed at a different level of action. It must also include an appreciation that actions have the potential to act against some objectives whilst working for others, particularly in regard to the manner in which they are conducted. The implication of this is our need to focus upon our medium and longer term objectives in the here and now to avoid self-sabotage.

Change is not a simple linear process that takes us smoothly from where we are to where we want to be. What we have learned from this study is that it is not the sequence nor planning of the change that is important but is, as Kurt Lewin would have recognised, the congruent adherence to a set of principles within a flexible framework of action that permits us to achieve our objectives, yet by no means guaranteeing that we will do so.

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